

## Catholics for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CFAR)

### *Background:*

The Message Stick is an Aboriginal means of communication and has also become a symbol of Reconciliation. To celebrate Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs in October 1986, Message Sticks were passed through many Parishes, primary and secondary schools throughout Victoria in 2005/2006. At St John the Baptist we were custodians of a Message Stick for one week during November 2005. We were part of a year long journey which took the Message Stick through over 600 parish and school organisations before reaching its final destination in Alice Springs.

Earlier this year Catholic communities were invited by the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne, CFAR, and the Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace, to 'Continue the Journey' by becoming permanent custodians of a Message Stick for active use in their liturgy and daily life: **a visible symbol of reconciliation.**

On Saturday June 23rd three representatives went to the Cardinal Knox Centre (two from the Social Justice Group) to collect our Message Stick. About 400 people representing many schools and parishes attended. Bishops Hilton Deakin, Christopher Prowse and Tim Costelloe along with Aboriginal Elders, were some of the dignitaries present. During this beautiful ceremony Patrick Sawyer was anointed as the custodian of our Message Stick.

Our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, the Message Stick with a plaque was presented at all Masses. On the plaque is written part of Pope John Paul II's speech: *"... The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others."*

**For further information regarding the Social Justice Group phone Patrick on 9752 3524 or Sam on 9759 6518.**



## **St John the Baptist Ferntree Gully Social Justice Group Newsletter—September 2007**

### **Aboriginal Acknowledgement**

Let us acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in which we stand today. Let us pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people and their elders, - past and present.

### **The Philippines Project The Columban Partnership Program**

Following Phil King's and Angela and Patrick Sawyer's visit with Dick Danckert from the Columban Partnership Program to the Philippines in November 2006, the details of the visit were presented to the Parish at all masses in December. An article also appeared in the Christmas issue of "Ein Karem". This year we held an information night in February and had Fr Brian Gore visit and give an excellent talk about the Philippines at the end of March. From all the different venues visited in the Philippines, we have decided to support the Community Based Rehabilitation Foundation (CBR) going forward. Our plan is to raise funds to support this foundation. Our aim is to raise about \$2,800 per year which could be used to buy 10 wheel chairs or 2 therapeutic ultrasounds or employ another therapist for 12 months. We currently need more donors to achieve this target. A flyer has been prepared giving information on this project and how you can help. These flyers are available at the back of the Church. If you are able to help this cause, please fill in an expression of interest form or contact Patrick Sawyer on 9752 3524 or Phil King on 9752 2927. Note that 100% of your donation goes to the CBR and the donations are tax deductible.

Please help us support this worthy cause.... **NOTE:** For those who have already agreed to ongoing support, we apologise in being a bit slow in getting back to you. We will be shortly.. **Patrick Sawyer**

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### Aboriginal Reconciliation "Their Spirit Still Shines"

Reconciliation Week was held on 27 May—3 June 2007. The week provides the opportunity for us all to walk the path to reconciliation and to share in the history of Australia's Indigenous people.

The celebrations this year (27 May) marked the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, when 90% of eligible Australians voted **YES** to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the national census and to remove discriminatory references in the Australian Constitution. This ensured the Commonwealth made laws for all Australian people (previously Aboriginal people in any State were excluded).

The 3 June marked the anniversary of the High Court of Australia's judgement in 1992 in the Mabo case. The decision recognised the Native Title rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The children at St John the Baptist Primary School were also involved in the raising and lowering of the Aboriginal flag during this week. They learnt the meaning of the colours of the Aboriginal flag; identified some famous sporting heroes of Aboriginal background; and discussed the issues associated with reconciliation.

NAIDOC is celebrated each year in the first full week of July and acknowledges the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Celebrations for 2007 was held from 8 to 15 July. The national theme for 2007 is: **50 Years: Looking Forward, Looking Blak.**



### Irrkerlantye Arts Project

St John's Primary School was invited by St John's Social Justice Group to form a partnering agreement with the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre, Alice Springs.

The Centre, established by the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, offers culturally specific educational programs to Arrernte indigenous students from outlying communities. The multifaceted, inter-generational design of the Centre provides programs for family members of all ages to study and work together, with the parents generating income through their artwork and the students gaining an education at the school.

Approximately 70 children attended the school, however, due to the transitory nature of the people, the school did not meet the attendance requirements targets deemed suitable by the Northern Territory Government. The Government subsequently employed a project officer to transfer the students to mainstream schooling in Alice Springs. Over a short period of time attendance rates fell substantially and, as a result, are large number of students are now not attending an educational facility.

The Social Justice Group, with the assistance of Mark Clarke (Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace) and St John's Primary School aim to raise awareness of the issue and pressure the Northern Territory Government to continue with Irrkerlantye. Recently the Government has funded students to return to the school to learn their indigenous language.

It was identified that the students require sport's equipment. Peter Cole (Sharing the Spirit) has organised some sporting goods for Irrkerlantye out of his "Fiji Collection" - thank you Peter....

### Other activities of interest.....

- Social Justice Sunday: Weekend of 30 September 2007
- Knox Deanery Dinner: To be held in 2008—details to follow....
- Refugee Week: June 2008
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Sunday: July 2008